New Jersey Standards Clarification Project

Phase I

New Jersey Department of Education

January 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Areas of Focus: The Bridge between Content Standards and Assessment

Language Arts Literacy Areas of Focus: Grade 5 Reading Language Arts Literacy Areas of Focus: Grade 5 Writing Language Arts Literacy Areas of Focus: Grade 6 Reading Language Arts Literacy Areas of Focus: Grade 6 Writing Language Arts Literacy Areas of Focus: Grade 7 Reading Language Arts Literacy Areas of Focus: Grade 7 Writing Language Arts Literacy Areas of Focus: Grade 8 Reading Language Arts Literacy Areas of Focus: Grade 8 Writing

Mathematics Areas of Focus: Grade 5 Mathematics Areas of Focus: Grade 6 Mathematics Areas of Focus: Grade 7 Mathematics Areas of Focus: Grade 8

Science Areas of Focus: Grade 8

Standards Clarification: All Content Areas Grades K-12

Visual and Performing Arts
Comprehensive Health and Physical Education
Language Arts Literacy
Mathematics
Science
Social Studies
World Languages
Technological Literacy
Career Education and Consumer, Family, and Life Skills

AREAS of FOCUS

in

Language Arts Literacy, Mathematics and Science The Bridge between Content Standards and Assessment

Intent

An important department goal in updating the statewide assessment system is to provide more information to educators in preparing students to successfully achieve the core curriculum content standards and to demonstrate proficiency in those standards on state assessments. The Areas of Focus documents for grades 5-8 in Language Arts Literacy, Mathematics and Science make explicit the content and skills that are the primary focus of teaching, learning and assessment at benchmark grade levels in each of these three content standards areas. Note that the design of curriculum, which considers context, emphasis and order of the standards and accompanying cumulative progress indicators (CPIs) is and remains the responsibility of local districts.

Areas of Focus

Areas of Focus/priorities have been identified in the standards within and across cumulative progress indicators to answer the question "What is most important?" and framed as big ideas, enduring understandings and essential questions. The overall intent is to keep what some would view as a vast array of CPIs from becoming overwhelming. As such, critical content, or the "heart" of the subject, becomes transparent for teachers and students providing an organizing structure for meaningful and connected learning, as well as opportunities for transfer of learning to other subject areas and real-life situations.

The reasons vary for why a particular indicator is not considered an area of focus. For example, the CPI may have been emphasized in a previous grade level, the item does not lend itself to state assessment structures, or the specific indicator may be contained within other areas of focus. Teachers should keep in mind that remediation and review of previously covered material may sometimes be necessary and, as such, other indicators are not eliminated from the standards. Note that some content areas include content as well as process-specific indicators that to not lend themselves to be assessed in complete isolation. Consequently, process standards are embedded in the content assessed. Citations are included to highlight this integration, when applicable.

In addition, the documents include: comments about certain CPIs, exemplars of how cumulative progress indicators may be assessed on state assessments and locally, and in some cases, instructional strategies and assessment strategies.

These Areas of Focus have also been provided to the assessment vendors and are being used to help shape the item development on state assessments. Since the areas of focus materials are living documents, additional examples and comments will be added periodically to provide further guidance for teachers. Feedback from educators is welcome.

A description of the Areas of Focus document format follows.

AREAS OF FOCUS FORMAT

Name of Content Area

Mission: Conveys the purpose of the content area by succinctly describing the skills gained from the study of that particular area and their practical application. It answers the question often asked by students: *Why should I study this subject?*

Standard Number Big Idea: A concept or core idea in the standard that is a critical for student understanding and has value beyond the classroom; a "linchpin" idea that is essential for understanding—without it, a student cannot go anywhere.	
Essential Questions	Enduring Understandings
Essential Questions tap into the big ideas of the subject, are broad in scope, raise other important questions and have no "right answer." They are designed to stimulate and sustain student interest.	Enduring Understandings are what is "worth" understanding from among a wide range of standards and indicators. They have lasting value because they are applicable to new situations within or beyond the content area.
Areas of Focus	Comments and Examples
 Strands and Cumulative Progress Indicators (CPIs) appear in this column and use the same letter and numbering system as found in the standards. Prioritized CPIs or CPIs that are specifically targeted as Areas of Focus for instruction, assessment and curricular emphasis are BOLDED. 	 Comments offer guidance for teachers about teaching and assessing certain CPIs and may also include areas of instructional focus and specific instructional and assessment strategies. Examples of Assessment Items: Examples generally reflect the format of statewide assessment items particular to these content areas. Answers are provided when appropriate, but teachers and assessment developers should recognize that there may be additional acceptable answers that have not been included. For multiple choice (MC) items, the correct answer is marked with an asterisk. For extended constructed response (ECR) items, the solutions are not included due to space. Items are not intended to be all-inclusive, but rather to provide an indication of the level of understanding that would reasonably be expected at a particular grade level.

Standards Clarification: All Content Areas Grades K-12

Intent

The purpose of **Phase One** of standards clarification in each of the nine content areas that is to convey an understanding of the priorities in the current *New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards* and how to capture those priorities in designing local curriculum and assessments, as well as in managing local instruction across content areas. Priorities have been identified in the standards within and across cumulative progress indicators to answer the question "**What is most important?**" and framed as big ideas, enduring understandings and essential questions. As such, critical content, or the "heart" of the subject, becomes transparent for teachers and students providing an organizing structure for meaningful and connected learning, as well as opportunities for transfer of learning to other subject areas and real-life situations.

Phase Two of the standards clarification project will build upon Phase One materials and consists of sample units for each content area, lesson plans containing performance tasks and accompanying rubrics, ideas for additional performance assessments that reflect various facets of understanding, samples of student work and content resources. This phase of the project will be in alignment with the new 2009 standards and disseminated with and in support of this document.

Format Description

Name of Content Area

Mission: Conveys the purpose of the content area by succinctly describing the skills gained from the study of that particular area and their practical application. It answers the question often asked by students: *Why should I study this subject?*

Standard Number	
Big Idea: A concept or core idea in the standard that is a critical for student understanding and has value beyond the classroom; a "linchpin" idea that is essential for understanding—without it, a student cannot go anywhere.	
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